

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-10 LAB-06

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USIA-15 DRC-01 /150 W

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8623

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB ETRN IN

SUBJECT: RAIL AND AVIATION DISPUTES

1. LONG SIMMERING DISPUTE WHICH DISRUPTED INDIA'S RAIL TRAFFIC LAST AUGUST (NEW DELHI 9226,9333 AND 5 62) ERUPTED AGAIN DECEMBER 15 WHEN THE ALL INDIA LOCO RUNNING STAFF ASSOCIATION (AILRSA) WENT ON AN INDEFINITE STRIKE IN THE NORTHERN DIVISIONS COMPLICATING FURTHER THE DISRUPTION OF THE TRANSPORT SYSTEM THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY RESULTING FROM LOCKOUT OF INDIA'S ONLY DOMESTIC AIRLINE- INDIAN AIRLINES (IA) SINCE NOVEMBER 24 (NEW DELHI 13695).

2. ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE THE DISRUPTION OF RAIL TRAFFIC, CASES OF INTIMIDATION, MASS ABSENTEEISM AND SABOTAGE BY STRIKING WORKERS HAVE BEEN REPORTED TO BE IMMOBILIZING PORTIONS OF THE RAIL SYSTEM. UNDER THE DEFENCE OF INDIA RULES (DIR) PROHIBITING STRIKES IN RAILWAYS (ORIGINALLY INVOKED LAST MAY AND EXTENDED FOR AN ADDITIONAL SIX MONTHS NOVEMBER 25), GOI HAS ANNOUNCED DEPLOYMENT

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TERRITORIAL ARMY (MILITIA) UNITS TO MOVE ESSENTIAL TRAFFIC

IN MOST SEVERELY AFFECTED AREAS (INCLUDING DELHI).

3. BASIC ISSUES INVOLVE REDUCTION IN WORKING SHIFTS FROM 14 TO 10 HOURS, RECOGNITION OF THE AILRSA (CRAFT) UNION, AND RESISTANCE TO AILRSA RECOGNITION BY THE TWO ALREADY RECOGNIZED MAJOR RAIL UNION - THE CONGRESS - ORIENTED NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN RAILWAYMAN (NFIA) AND THE SOCIALIST PARTY-ORIENTED ALL INDIA RAILWAYMEN'S FEDERATION (AIRF).

4. THE IA LOCKOUT WAS NECESSITATED BY THE RESISTANCE BY THE

EMPLOYEES TO THE MANAGEMENT'S INTRODUCTION OF NATIONALIZED SHIFT SYSTEM SO AS TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE DEFICIT-RIDDEN CORPORATION. WHILE THE MANAGEMENT HAS INSISTED ON ITS "RIGHT TO MANAGE" THE UNIONS HAVE RESISTED THE "UNILATERAL" MANAGEMENT ACTION.

5. THE CPI-ORIENTED LABOR MINISTER, RAGHUNATHA REDDY, HAS RESPONDED TO UNIONS SEEKING HIS INTERVENTION THAT SETTLEMENT OF BOTH THESE DISPUTES ARE MATTERS FOR "INTERNAL MANAGEMENT". THE LOCOMEN DISPUTE IS BEING HANDLED BY THE RAILWAY MINISTER L.N. MISHRA AND AIRLINE DISPUTE BY IA CHAIRMAN AIR CHIEF MARSHAL P.C. LAL, WHO HANDLES MATTERS OWN WAY TAKING TOUGH STANCE. PROCEDURALLY, LABOR MINISTRY MAY NOT INTERVENE UNTIL DISPUTE REFERRED BY ADMINISTERING MINISTRY.

6. AS A RESULT OF THE TWO DISPUTES, INDIA'S TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEM HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY AFFECTED. THE RAIL DISPUTE HAS NOW DISRUPTED THE MOVEMENT OF PASSENGERS AND GOODS,(PARTICULARLY COAL TO INDUSTRIAL SITES AND ESSENTIAL FOOD COMMODITIES) IN NORTHERN AND EASTERN INDIA AND IS THREATENING TO SPREAD TO THE CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN REGIONS.
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